

House Republican Press Release

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HOUSE APPROVES UNDERAGE DRINKING BILL COSPONSORED BY REPRESENTATIVE FREY



Local Legislator Cites Ridgefield Tragedy On House Floor

HARTFORD—On Tuesday, April 18, the House of Representatives today approved legislation cosponsored by State Representative John H. Frey, R-Ridgefield, that would make it illegal for people to allow underage drinking on private property. House Bill 5211, An Act Concerning Underage Drinking, now moves to the State Senate for consideration.

Under current law, the penalty for illegal possession in public places is a fine of \$200 to \$500. The bill makes this the penalty for second and subsequent offenses of illegal possession, regardless of location, and makes a first offense an infraction. It would also make subsequent offenses subject to up to one year in prison, a fine of up to \$500, or both.

The legislation would allow police to enter private property if they have evidence indicating that adults are hosting a party or allowing minors to possess alcohol in violation. While Ridgefield has a local ordinance with similar provisions, HB 5211 would permit law enforcement in all towns and cities to prosecute such offenses.

“Ridgefield has experienced first-hand the tragic results of underage drinking on private property,” Representative Frey said during the floor debate in the House. “In 1983, many families were touched by a fatal accident that occurred following the high school graduation. Being especially sensitive to youth drinking, our town responded with organized post-graduation parties and passing an ordinance addressing underage drinking. I am certain this bill will save lives and prevent towns from experiencing the heartache that we shared in Ridgefield.”

According to the Connecticut Coalition to Stop Underage Drinking, Connecticut is one of only eight states that allow possession of alcohol by minors on private property without the presence of a parent or adult guardian.

“The fact that state statutes still allow underage drinking on private property has become increasingly problematic,” said Rep. Frey, who serves as an Assistant Minority Leader. “Since the legal drinking age was raised to 21 in 1985, there has been a loophole for

breaking that law and I'm pleased the House overwhelmingly supported removing it today."

Among those testifying in favor of HB 5211 during a February public hearing were Attorney General Richard Blumenthal, Chief State's Attorney Christopher Morano and representatives from the State's Victims Advocate Office, Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and the Connecticut Police Chief's Association.